

Notes

Introduction

1. Although this work engages in a deep conversation about the legacies of colonialism and the slave trade, it is not related to the politics of the American Descendants of Slavery (ADOS) movement. Proponents of ADOS differentiate between Black Americans descended from slaves and Black Americans who do not share this history for largely political ends (state-sanctioned reparations, for instance). I keep my focus on the tragic impacts of colonialism specifically because they are the common ground that unite all BIPOC people historically, economically, and even representationally in solidarity against common forms of oppression. So even though this book considers the history of slavery in North America in some detail, it does so only to make one part of a larger point about the deep and common history of torture and abuse devised by imperialist and colonialist efforts.

2. Let me go a little deeper. In this book, I often toggle between Black and BIPOC. My use of these terms is deliberate in the text and intended to hail the respective populations noted. In other words, when I use the word *Black*, I use it to refer to Black Americans, and when I use the term *BIPOC*, it connotes all BIPOC globally, including Black Americans. I vary my usage because this book draws on American studies, specifically that which relates to the Black American experience, in order to make a broader argument about the invisibility of BIPOC trauma, pain, and feeling in White spaces of play. And

while I recognize that the Black American experience is not universal, it is just one voice in the greater BIPOC chorus, it is my hope that the shared sense of suffering wrought from these experiences will act as a tonic by grounding this theory of play in something common.

3. A careful reader might note that Huizinga does discuss games of chance in his writing—for example, he discusses the use of dice games in the Indian epic *The Mahabharata*. In these instances, however, Huizinga fails to relate how gambling might produce socioeconomic disparity.

4. It is worth noting here that Rosa Eidepes's historical work reveals a critique of Roger Caillois by Theodore Adorno for holding "cryptofascist tendencies." Adorno contended that Caillois uncritically defaulted to a sublime notion of the "natural order" (Eidepes 2014, 9). Although I agree with this critique, I take an ambivalent stance toward the political beliefs of Caillois and other play scholars described in this book. I believe that the theorizing of play done by these figures is problematic only insofar as they adopt a moral stance toward the concept. By recentering the ways that play can be torturous, "corrupt," or painful, we curb fascist, racist, and sexist tendencies that set White culture or "civilization" against a "barbaric" natural order.

5. Constructivists argue that knowledge is constructed through action and experience. Piaget and Vygotsky argue that through play in particular people learn fundamentals, such as language. While for Piaget this play was more individual and for Vygotsky this play was more interpersonal, the overall educational theory of constructivism argues that informal and playful practices are often the foundation upon which institutional and formal structures of education—school for example—are built.

6. Mahli-Ann Rakkomkaew Butt and Thomas Apperley have argued that approaches to inclusivity in gaming often involve assimilation into a problematic heteronormative male status quo. I would add that the assimilative norms of inclusivity frequently suggest that Black folks should assimilate to a White supremacist status quo as well (Butt and Apperley 2018, 39).

7. I use this term in the valence intended by my colleague Roderic Crooks who suggests that it makes visible the power relationships of minority people as opposed to their demography (Crooks 2019, 119).

8. Russworm makes this point well in her book that explains how the history of games is itself a White supremacist enterprise (or in her words “White. White. White.”) The stories of BIPOC people, developers, and designers are often occluded in historical projects that center White designers and developers of games (Russworm 2019).

Chapter 1

1. This statement was recorded here: <https://www.laughingplace.com/w/news/2019/04/30/floyd-norman-defends-dumbo-crow-scene-amid-rumors-potential-censorship/>

2. Huizinga argued that without play, we would lack the fundamental ingredients for myth and ritual. Without these approaches to communication, there would be no institutions of “civilized” life. He wrote, “Archaic society, we would say, plays as the child or animal plays. Such playing contains at the outset all the elements proper to play: order, tension, movement, change, solemnity, rhythm, rapture. Only in a later phase of society is play associated with the idea of something to be expressed in and by it, namely, what we would call ‘life’ or ‘nature.’ Then, what was wordless play assumes poetic form. In the form and function of play, itself and independent entity that is senseless and irrational, man’s consciousness that he is imbedded in a sacred order of things finds its first, highest, and holiest expression. Gradually the significance of a sacred act permeates the playing. Ritual grafts itself upon it; but the primary thing is and remains play” (Huizinga 1980, 17–8).

3. Piaget writes, “The phenomenon of ‘pre-exercise,’ which K. Groos considered the characteristic of all play, can only be explained by the biological process according to which every organ develops through use” (1962, 87).

4. To Piaget, play is an essential part of the meaning-making process. Play, as an act, spoke to the assimilative potential of the mind. It

opposed the associative qualities of thought, which Piaget considered mere imitation. The moment of play/assimilation, for Piaget, is a primal drive to power: “Play, on the contrary [to imitation], proceeds by relaxation of the effort at adaptation and by maintenance or exercise of activities for the mere pleasure of mastering them and acquiring thereby a feeling of virtuosity or power” (Piaget 1962, 89).

5. Piaget feels that the play of magic serves as an early stage of meaning-making for children. However, argues that they quickly grow out of it when they are able to arrive at “objective notions” (Piaget 1962, 261). But what of cultures and people for whom “magic” is regularly still practiced through ritual? I conjecture that Piaget would either dismiss these rituals as superstition and question whether the people practicing truly “believe” in the magic or simply see these spiritual beliefs as childish.

6. Caillois (2001) writes, “Just as the principle of *agôn* (competition) is abruptly destroyed by vertigo, *alea* (chance) is similarly destroyed [by mimicry] and there is no longer any game, properly speaking.” (73)

7. Spariousu (1989) explains, “Pre-rational thought generally conceives of play as a manifestation of power in its ‘natural,’ unashamed, unmediated form, ranging from the sheer delight of emotional release to raw and arbitrary violence. Power can be experienced both as ecstatic, exuberant, and violent play and as a pleasurable welling up and gushing forth of strong emotion. Rational thought, in contrast, generally separates play from both unmediated or ‘innocent’ power and raw violence. Indeed, it sees play as a form of mediation between what it now represses as the ‘irrational’ (the chaotic conflict of physical forces, the disorderly eruption of violent emotion, the unashamed gratification of the physical senses, etc.) and controlling Reason, or the universal Will to Order” (Spariousu, 12).

Chapter 2

1. Akil explains that the post was later reprinted by a number of news outlets, including “Kotaku, Quartz, Mic, Huffington Post, and POPSUGAR. Various news sites, such as Vox, NPR, *USA Today*, VIBE,

Slate, the Mary Sue, and a few others also referenced the piece. It was even mentioned in an episode of *The Young Turks*."

2. The murder has not stopped. Famously the killing of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor remind us today of Akil's point. Being Black in the United States means that you are subject to a separate set of laws and that your life is seen as less important than that of your White neighbors by law enforcement.

3. For Ahmed, happy objects are characterized less by whether they themselves are "happy" but rather a perceived happiness that they might one day produce. For example, a new car might be a happy object even if the loan payments that accompany the car produce a good deal of sorrow. Succinctly, happy objects are productive of both pleasurable and painful affects specifically because they promise happiness.

4. As Anne Allison (2009) explains, "As it is true everywhere around the world today, a more flexible (*ryudoka*) economy is emerging: one based ever more on service rather than manufacturing, and on the irregular pulsations of a market driven by information, communication and speculation" (90). This shift toward a service economy is relevant to Hardt's (1999) concept of affective labor—the dimension of labor concerned with human contact and interaction (95). Affective labor is undercompensated in our society. As Bernard Steigler has noted, we have not yet produced systems of care to match the explosive growth of the new technologically networked society (Crogan 2010, 166).

Chapter 3

1. This practice is also termed "rules lawyering." Steven Dashiell (2017) goes to great lengths to describe the perks of rules lawyering—namely, the social capital this knowledge provides players who police the rules.

2. In his reading of Huizinga, play theorist Peter McDonald describes the figure of the spoilsport as being key to understanding the free and liberating dimensions that Huizinga wanted to theorize within play.

For play to be truly liberating, in Huizinga's philosophy, one must have the freedom to transgress the rules and spoil a game (McDonald 2019, 257).

Chapter 4

1. No apparent relationship to W.E.B.
2. As noted in the introduction, "dark play" and the often-related BDSM play have been a fascination of both game studies scholars and some contemporary scholars of play. These accounts of play generally share the common premise that play is voluntary and consensual. As Jaakko Stenros observes, the very category of "dark play" is predicated on the premise that most play is "positive" (Stenros 2019, 13). My account of play aims to deepen this work by suggesting that play is rarely voluntary. For more on this, see *The Dark Side of Gameplay* (Mortensen, Linderoth, and Brown 2018) and *Transgression in Games and Play* (Jørgensen and Karlsen 2018).

Chapter 5

1. Wargames are typically games played with cardboard chits or miniatures on a large hexagonal grid overlaid atop a map. They were the dominant hobby game scene in the 1960s, and Avalon Hill was the main publisher of wargames at the time. *Risk* and *Diplomacy* are two of the more famous wargames published by Avalon Hill.
2. A good summary of the exchange is available here: <https://www.videogameschronicle.com/news/cyberpunk-creator-responds-to-2077-criticism-who-do-you-think-you-are/>.
3. I do not think Lang is making a statement about race and BIPOC culture in the game *Blood Rage*. Instead, I think Lang was using the rich mythology of Nordic culture to design a game that would make his design work legible to a community of largely White hobbyists.
4. I recount a short history of Avalon Hill and TSR Hobbies' magazine covers earlier in this chapter to help make this point. Another excellent example of a typical attitude toward representing BIPOC

people in wargames is the atrociously titled book by Phil Eklund in his simulationist game Pax Parimir, *In Defense of British Colonialism*. Pax Parimir is about indigenous communities being played against one another by colonial rule. Here Eklund writes, “British rule was more stable than the weak, corrupt, and capricious regimes they replaced. Both India and Afghanistan had suffered from centuries of battles between petty warlords. But in India, British rule brought a century of peace, marred only by the localized 1857 Indian Mutiny. Upon Indian independence in 1947, the end of Pax Britannica immediately sparked the Tamil separatist movement, as well as an endless series of Indo-Pakistani wars and conflicts. Since both countries now have the bomb, the next war could be nuclear, with dire consequences for the world.” Eklund’s description highlights the degree to which some designers still view the culture of BIPOC people as barbaric and in so doing continue to frame Western European culture as that which is “civilized,” thus presuming that all others are barbaric. You can find this excerpt from the Pax Parimir rulebook here: https://playthesethings.files.wordpress.com/2018/11/pax_pamir_excerpt.pdf.

Conclusion

1. That is, White European culture is “civilized” because “civilization” is defined by a set of White European standards, not according to any objective criteria.
2. <https://files.curiosity.com/theotherlab/yeornay/v0/10/12/>.

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A Black Phenomenology

By: Aaron Trammell

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